

546 although he was willing to help Chukembégn, he felt quite differently about helping Chukembégn's brother, Kapíli. Kapíli had for a long time felt himself deserted by his wife's brother Waipó, and news of his anger had somehow reached Yuvén. But Waipó was Yuvén's co-husband, and Yuvén was angry, particularly because Waipó had died. "Yuvén came with many jacutingas. Wainlúin [his wife, the sister of Chukembégn and Kapíli] gave some to her brother Kapíli, but Yuvén ignored him. Kanyahé [Waipó's brother] did not speak to Kapíli." The situation between Kapíli and Waipó could be interpreted either as desertion on the part of Waipó or as desertion on the part of Kapíli. The close relatives of Waipó interpreted it, of course, in the latter way. This is the constant condition within the extended families: the streams of resentment are manifold, and the drying up of one does not mean the establishment of accord.

Property

556 In Kaingáng society there was only one reason for a man's accumulating
852 property—in order to give it away to his affinal relatives when his little boy's lower lip was pierced for the insertion of the lip plug or when his little girl's thigh was pricked to make her "able to walk." In preparation for this festa of "blackening the children"⁷ a number of men raided the Brazilians, stole their property, and came back and made beer for their affinal relatives. The people particularly singled out for recognition on this occasion were the child's *kókla* and *mbé*, the male and female affinal relatives who buried the child's umbilical cord in the water and who on this day pierced its lip or thigh and symbolically "made" the child, thereby completing the process through which they become the child's ceremonial father and mother.⁸ This was the child's ceremonial induction into the long series of activities through which in later life his bond with his father's relatives by marriage was maintained, with the vicissitudes to which all relationships were subjected in Kaingáng society. But it is not only the *kókla*, the ceremonial father, and the *mbé*, the ceremonial mother, who received gifts on this day, but also other affinal relatives of the father, no matter whether he had come by them through his wife or through his sisters or cousins.

421 Accumulation of property is incomprehensible to the Kaingáng. Property is for use in the struggle for existence. It is not a means to prestige or power. Like most of the abstract values that our civilization has exploited, the concept of power over people is little developed among the Kaingáng. What property they gather above the immediate needs of existence is distributed throughout life to their close relatives. In days long ago, before the

⁷ So called from the practice of smearing the children with charcoal. See Appendix III.

⁸ See Appendix III.

Europeans invaded the land, there must have been much less emphasis on property than there is now. Two centuries ago the Kaingáng had only the things they made—weapons, clothing, and baskets—for they had no trade with other tribes. Once they began to steal from the Brazilian settlers, however, they acquired a large number of new things: iron for their arrowheads, knives, axes, iron pots, and the precious blankets. Frequently these are given away almost immediately to anyone who asks for them. To hold anything back is practically useless, because the article will be taken anyway—as happened, for example, with the deer skin I refused Ndli. The following story indicates what may happen to desirable property.

"Kavá got an axe from the Brazilians. He took it out of a [Brazilian] house. Mumbégn went to another house, but it was closed, for the people inside would not open the door. Kavá came over, and Mumbégn said, 'Give me the axe.' He was going to break open the door. He broke open the door and entered. He looked for another axe but could not find one. 'Ai,' said he, 'I'm going to take this one. It is fine.' So he took the axe and went to the forest. Kavá said to Mumbégn, 'Where is the axe I got?' 'I have taken it—ignore⁹ it.' So Kavá ignored it and Mumbégn kept it." If he had protested, the same thing might have happened to him as happened to me or to Thegnmbégn. "Thegnmbégn went to the Brazilians and got a big knife. On the way back they [the Indians] shot a tapir and butchered it. The tapir was cut up with that knife, and then Wanenggló took it, for he wanted to steal it. Klakupú followed him and said: 'Give it to me, I want it. If he [Thegnmbégn] worries about it I'll say that I took it.' Thegnmbégn looked for his knife, and when he did not see it he followed them, and when he overtook them he said, 'Did you take my knife away?' But they answered, 'No.' Klakupú, who really had it, said: 'It is in that clear space where I was before. It is under the tapir dung.' Thegnmbégn returned to look for it, but at sundown he followed them again. Next day he said: 'My knife was a good one. Did you see it?' 'No.' Again he returned, and again he searched all about. The others waited for him and camped where they were. The following day he again searched and again returned to the others, but Klakupú had gone. Once more Thegnmbégn looked for his knife. He was searching with Kavá and said to him, 'Let's go; probably one of the folks took my knife.' By the time they returned the others had arrived in camp. 'Who saw my knife, folks?' said Thegnmbégn. 'I'm bent double with looking for it. If I had seen one of you take it I'd beat him up with my club and throw him out! That's what I was saying when I came along!' So Klakupú said: 'I took the knife! I took it to make arrows with. Now that you know it beat me with a club and throw me out!' But Thegnmbégn laughed and said, 'I meant that if someone *else* had taken it

⁹ *Kabégn*, literally "ignore."

42/I would have done that to him.' "Probably," said my informant, "Klakupú was Thegnmbégn's father's relative's child, and that is why nothing happened to him—or his mother's relative's child—therefore he took the thing."

The ease with which Wanenggló relinquished the knife contrasts sharply with Thegnmbégn's possessiveness. Thegnmbégn was also unusual in that he decided to do something about the disappearance of his property. A knife I once gave to an informant did not stay with him very long, but with characteristic Kaingáng philosophy he did nothing to further its return. "Where is the knife I gave you?" I said to him one day after he had repeatedly borrowed mine. "Ho! That disappeared long ago!" "Who took it?" "The others." He had never even made the effort to discover who had it—a simple matter in such a small community. Even when property is borrowed it may never be returned unless the owner comes to claim it, for the Kaingáng feel under absolutely no obligation to return what has been lent to them.

In-laws are particularly likely to make free with one's property. Nowadays they are a nuisance to hunters who have laid aside stores of powder and shot for hunting trips, only to discover, when they are ready to go, that some son- or brother-in-law has come along in their absence, ferreted out the hiding-place, and gone up the river, taking not only the ammunition but also the dog and even the canoe. To cap it all, the in-law may lose the dog in the forest and give only a small piece of the kill to his relative, while he carries off a fat leg to his sweetheart.

Men and women own the things that they make themselves or which have been given to them by their relatives. A woman has the right of disposal of any of her possessions, and if she has an excess she may give away what she sees fit. As for food, either the man or the woman may give it away, and there is no feeling that it is "owned" by either one of them. As a matter of fact the only time that the problem of ownership is important in Kaingáng society is when a man has a number of desirable objects or when a particularly desirable object makes its appearance. Excess objects are most frequently the property of men, who have got them in a raid, and they are given away to their close relatives. Women generally get desirable objects such as scissors or knives or iron pots through inheritance or gift, but since they usually have only one such article the problem of disposing of them rarely arises. Like the distribution of food, the distribution of property among the Kaingáng is conditioned not by a strong sense of reciprocity but by the feeling of obligation to certain people, with the result that throughout life women may receive property from their in-laws without ever being able to reciprocate. The emphasis in these cases is not on reciprocity, on the evening-up of scores, but on relationship.